

This Week in Congress

December 15, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Addressing the Bailout Plan for the Big 3 Automakers

I traveled to Washington, D.C. this week as the House of Representatives reconvened to take a vote on a \$14 billion automaker bailout plan. The plan would have provided a loan program to the auto industry, however, it did little to make sure that the Big 3 automakers would be able to compete in the market against other foreign manufacturers.

The legislation would have also appointed a "car czar" who would have had a day-to-day influence on auto manufacturing operations, which I see as counterproductive. The bill also does little to encourage the automakers and the labor unions to come together to address the long-term, labor-related financial obligations which are a major cost to the big three automakers. I believe it would be irresponsible to invest taxpayer money on these companies without addressing these concerns. I do not oppose granting a loan program to the auto companies if they can return to competitiveness globally. I am concerned about the erosion of America's manufacturing sector and believe those jobs should be supported. However, I could not support this specific legislation due to its fatal flaws.

On Tuesday night, the House of Representatives passed the \$14 billion automaker bailout plan 237 - 170. It was my hope that the Senate would take the House bill and improve the legislation in ways I mentioned and send legislation back to the House that I could support. Unfortunately, the plan stalled in the Senate and is unlikely to be revised or passed. I have heard from many Kansans and will continue to listen to your thoughts and concerns about this issue. I always welcome any suggestions or comments that you may have. [Click here](#) to send me a message.

Requesting President-Elect Obama Support VA Enrollment for All Veterans

This week, I sent a letter requesting President-elect Barack Obama support the eligibility of all veterans to receive health care. Since 2003, the Veterans Affairs (VA) Priority Group 8 has not been permitted to enroll in VA health care. This year Congress provided funding to increase enrollment of Priority Group 8 veterans by 10 percent. I do not believe that any veterans' groups should be denied access to health care. [Click here](#) to read more.

Beginning 13th Annual Listening Tour

My annual Big First Listening Tour begins today with stops in Washington and Republic counties. Every year since coming to Congress I hold a town hall meeting in each of the counties I represent. These meetings give me the opportunity to visit with Kansans so that I can take their concerns to our nation's capital. Today, December 15, I will visit Washington County, in Washington at Gambino's Pizza, 317 W. 7th Street, at 12:30 p.m. Later today, I will be in Republic County, in Belleville at the Belleville Public Library, 1327 19th Street, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

On Tuesday, December 16, my first stop will be in Gove County, in Quinter, at the Jay Johnson Public Library, in the Meeting Room, 411 Main Street from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. My second stop tomorrow will be in Sheridan County, in Hoxie, at Trish's Steakhouse, 744 Main Street, at 12:30 p.m.

[Click here](#) to view the schedule for upcoming tour stops.

House Passes Legislation to Help Seniors' Retirement Accounts Recover

The House passed the Worker, Retiree and Employer Recovery Act this week that will temporarily waive any penalties for seniors 70 ½ and older who did not take out their annual required minimum distribution from their IRAs, 401(k)s and 403(b)s in 2009. I supported the legislation to reverse the 50 percent tax penalty that normally would be applied on an amount that needed to be withdrawn, and was not. Retirement accounts this year have been hit hard with the condition of the economy, and seniors do not need a tax burden on their money. The legislation passed in the Senate this week and now goes to the President's desk for his signature.

Kansas Food Banks Need Donations

Across our state, food banks combat hunger by helping hungry Kansans get the food they need. Unfortunately, the demand for food is exceeding donations at many food banks. During the Christmas season, I encourage those who are able to consider others in need and give what they can to help the hungry. My offices in Hays, Hutchinson and Salina have partnered with local food banks to collect non-perishable food items through Friday, December 19. If you live in the Hays, Hutchinson or Salina areas, you may drop off your donation at [my office](#) . Kansans in other parts of the state may donate to a food bank near them.

Visiting with Business Leaders at Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce Meeting

This week, I attended a Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce Meeting in Kansas City, Missouri. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with business leaders on the Federal Affairs Committee and the Executive Committee from the Kansas City community. Several issues discussed with board members during the Executive Committee meeting included economic development opportunities, the economic stimulus plan, health care reform and the value of supporting community health clinics. Thanks to Cathy K. Bennett, the director of Government Relations, for inviting me to speak.

Visiting with Agricultural Producers at the Kansas Commodity Classic

On Tuesday I attended the Kansas Commodity Classic in Salina. The convention is hosted by the Kansas Corn Growers Association, Kansas Association of Wheat Growers and the Kansas Grain Sorghum Producers Association. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with agricultural producers from across the state about many current issues. The discussion focused on who may be named the Secretary of Agriculture, the implementation of the farm bill, the cow tax and additional regulations, crop insurance, trade agreements and energy policy.

Attending Kansas Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association Board Meeting

On Thursday, I attended the Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association (PMCA) of Kansas board meeting in Topeka. PMCA of Kansas is a nonprofit trade association that encourages independent growth for retailers and owners in the petroleum marketing industry throughout the state. During my visit, I discussed relevant issues such as: the recent drop in oil and gas prices; competition with international energy sources; ways to promote conservation and possible domestic alternative energy sources. Thanks to PMCA Executive Director Tom Palas for hosting me.

In the Office

Gary Brunk of Topeka was in this week with Kansas Action for Children to discuss the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Sunee Mickle of Topeka was in with Kansas Blue Cross/Blue Shield to talk about health reform. Julie Govert-Walter of Manhattan with the Kansas Area Agency on Aging was in the office to talk to me about maintaining services for seniors.

Mark Farr of Nickerson and Verlean Brown of Wichita with the Kansas NEA were in the office to discuss the upcoming educational funding priorities. Karyn Page of Wichita with the Kansas World Trade Center visited the office to discuss the Kansas World Trade Center's work over the past year.

Don L. McNeely of Topeka, Dale Wiley of Lawrence and David Shepherd of Fort Scott with the Kansas Automobile Dealers Association were in to talk about the automobile rescue package.

The Rob Ramseyer family from Wichita visited my Washington, DC office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry